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ABSTRACT

The author listed four possible avenues for fostering international relations: individual contacts; letters, tapes, etc.; broadcasts and telecasts; and literature. Literature was described as an excellent means of communication and as a vehicle for creating good will, promoting understanding, and clearing up misconceptions. Several ways is which literature fits into the role of fostering international relations were mentioned: (1) literature can promote an awareness of the similarity of problems between nations; (2) literature can reveal man's quest for peace, although the route may seem hazy and circuitous; and (3) literature can help people to see the humane qualities of others. Suggestions are presented for effectively utilizing literature in this role. References are included. (NH)

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THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN FOSTERING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Session

Friday, May 8, 1970

2:15 - 3:15 P.M.

In a world of instantaneous communication such as radio, satellites, and television, one may well inquire as to why there should be a concern for the role of literature to foster international relations. Aren't these electronic inventions much swifter and more effective than books.

The truth of the matter is that nations can already probe each other's skies, monitor broadcasts, and detect the most subtle kinds of military preparations. However, these intrusion into the affairs of even friendly nations may hinder rather than help international relations. What so badly needed is a renewed effort to build bridges between

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groups and nations -- to probe the motives and feelings of others to detect and understand problems others encounter in order to forge a lasting world peace. Literature will help in this endeavor.

In the opening it should be pointed out that international education attempts to sensitize students to national characteristics, customs, beliefs and attitudes which helps them to realize and appreciate differences and similarities between groups of people. Plainly then, intercultural studies should strengthen rather than undermine the individual's patriotic sentiments. (8)

AVENUES FOR FOSTERING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

There are at least four avenues for fostering international relations but three of them are limited and circumscribed as one notes by examining them:

(1) individual contacts. These face to face meetings are valuable for getting to know people better, but for the most part, only a small percentage of the world's people ever travel to other countries or get to know each other on a one-to-one basis.

(2) letters, tapes, etc. These means of communication, though more frequent and possible than individual contacts, hardly suffice to penetrate barriers to facilitate mutual understanding on a broad spectrum.

(3) broadcasts and telecasts. Although cultural braodcasts and telecasts periodically are beamed to other countries, much of this kind of activity is propagandistic in nature and

devoted to swaying the beliefs of citizens of other countries. In almost all instances, these broadcasts peddle isms, assail each other's weaknesses, and trigger animosities.

(4) literature. The fourth mode of fostering international relations is through literature, and it is this theme that will be developed in this paper.

AMERICA - WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Before moving to the international arena, one must first examine the American scene, as others view it, in order to get a glimpse of the scope and magnitude of the problem of trying to understand others. To many nations, Americans are immature, boastful of their technological achievements, selfish, and easily given to violence, and conquest. Moreover, foreigners declare that the American culture is hedonistic and materialistic. Hollywood-made movies reinforce the belief that everyone here drives big cars, is wealthy, and many are gansters. Americans do not hesitate to go to war, or to seize territory belonging to another if the opportunity present itself. (3)

Is this an accurate picture of the good old U.S.A.? While some of it is true, most Americans would recoil at such a picture.

Now for another characterization: The Germans. According to some sources, Germans are aggressive, war-like, and consume great quantities of beer and eat "heavy" food. Is this an accurate picture? This writer did not find it to be true at all, albeit there are some instances where such was the case. The Germans he met were friendly, helpful,

courteous, and although there was some beer drinking, not everyone was standing at a bar.

WHY LITERATURE CAN BE UTILIZED

In literature can be found an excellent means of communications. It is one of the best vehicles for creating good will, promoting understanding, and clearing up misconceptions, of all devices open to mankind.

This assertation can be made for at least three reasons. First, literature, and by that is meant those writing which have stood the test of time, or whose message is so potent and accurate that it speaks to all generations, is a <u>common denominator</u>. That is to say, many people read, and thus share a common interest, a common pursuit, and get to know each other's way of life much better, although separated by a concrete wall, ocean barrier, or other such impediments. However, the total number of such readers are a small group when considered in ratio to the world's population. This fact suggests the continued job ahead for teachers to cultivate an appreciation for literature on the part of their students as a means of increasing world understanding.

LITERATURE AS A MIRROR

In addition to being a common denominator for world folk, literature is a mirror through which people see themselves. It, indeed, acts as a reflecting pool in which a person may see the great moments of his country's history as well as the dark periods. For example, one can take pride in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and read it as one of the greatest documents of the world. At the same time, he views another

aspect of conditions during the same decade upon reading Uncle Tom's Cabin. While some literature is overdrawn and the characters emerge as exotic or larger than life, the thoughtful reader will see the reflection of an age or era and through it gain an appreciation of the problems and issues of the times.

LITERATURE AS PERSPECTIVE AND BALANCE

A third reason literature contributes to improved international is because it gives perspective and balance. In a real sense, this is part of the job of history, but literature also serves this function. Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind reveals the beauty and graciousness of the Old South, but at the same time, the reader sees the description of an economic system built upon slave labor with all of its inherent evils. One sees in such lesser known books as By Secret Railway by Meadowcraft and Railroad to Freedom by Swift, a much more definitive picture of the problems of the era and gains an appreciation for the oppressed black man whose greatest ambition was to escape from the prison of plantation life.

ROLE OF LITERATURE IN FOSTERING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

There are several ways in which literature fits into the role of fostering international relations.

Literature can promote an awareness of the similarity of problems between nations. While the United States struggles with the problems of urbanization and all it entails, this same syndrome is troubling West Africa, according to Hilda Kuper in Urbanization and Migration in West

Africa. (5) In that country, as in America, the movement from farm to city has created unemployment in technological industries, while at the same time, bringing on a shortage of farm labor. To cite another example - though quite removed from West Africa - the village of Nayon, near Quito, Ecuador, was transformed into a suburbia by the construction of a railroad which brought "civilization", and with it the attendent problems of disintegration of the family and of the individual. These conditions were unknown to ife in that small remote village until it was joined to Quito by mode transportation.

In addition, world people have similar problems such as creating and maintaining sanitary living conditions and in eradicating communicable diseases. Pollution of the environment is an example of another problem facing inhabitants of almost all countries.

These examples, as well as others which could be supplied, attest to the existence of many common problems. Through literature one comes to appreciate ways others have confronted and triumphed over the same difficulties which they themselves face.

Literature reveals man's quest for peace though the route may seem hazy and circuitous. One cannot read the great literature of Europe, or of some specific country for that matter, without becoming amazed at the number of disputes, uprisings, rebellions, and skirmishes, not to mention full scale assaults and wars. Almost every piece of territory has belonged to many dukes, empires, or kingdoms at different times in history. What is surprising is that there have not been more wars when one reads books like Germany Two Thousand Years, by Kurt F. Reinhardt. (6) When he reads further about Germany, for instance, he finds out

that entire volumes have been written just to explore the German "question", or the German "problem". Each country has its own set of questions and problems and while each is challenged to find a satisfactory internal solution, such is not always forthcoming. (2)

It is important to emphasize that literature provides help in understanding world tensions, but at the same time, the impression should not be left that all one must do if he wishes to solve problems of world peace is to read. Obviously, the quandary is much deeper. But a step is the first part of a thousand mile journey and the beginning of a new era in international relations may be ushered in when people first opt to learn through reading about the conditions others live in and the problems they face.

Literature performs another vital role: it helps people see the humaneness of others. This is seen in the fact that everyone has similar social, psychological, and physiological needs. Food, shelter, and clothing are the primary ones. Furthermore, people are alike in that they need security, acceptance achievement, and a feeling of worthiness. Anthropologists declare that people of the world are becoming more and more alike than different in their habits, customs, and aspirations. One youth in a remote Pacific island reported that his parents "moved from the Stone Age into the present age within 30 years." Time magazine quoted him as saying "My father was a cannibal, but I'm going to be a doctor." (7)

In elementary school, students should begin this process of identification by learning how people make a living, what kinds of homes they

live in, what others eat, wear, etc. A casual glance at the latest list of children's books will provide an almost inexhaustible supply of well-written titles. Young people will learn from literature about holidays around the world. It may come as a shock to some of them to learn that other countries have no fourth of July celebration but have their own day of liberation to commemorate.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO TEACHING ABOUT INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

What then can be done to more effectively utilize literature in the role of fostering international relations? The following suggestions are germane.

One: The teacher himself should become more sensitized to the problems of international relations and to avenues for achieving world peace. Edmund Burke once wrote: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." This statement suggests that the problems of world order must be taken seriously by everyone. There is abundant proof that social studies textbooks of all countries contribute to misunderstanding and prejudice by omitting appropriate materials or by failure to present sufficient data where such is needed. Two books illuminate this subject, one by Ray A. Billington (1) and another by E. H. Dance. (4)

Two: As a second soluation, frequent contacts between students and visitors from other countries should be encouraged. Next to travel this substitutionary source of information is one of the best known for learning about remote places.

Third: Teachers should take advantage of United Nations Day and other important occasions to emphasize other cultures. Periodicals such as THE AMERICAS, published by the Organization of American States, will stimulate students to learn more about their nearest neighbors - Canada, Mexico, South and Central America as they study about people more remote in time and place.

CONCLUSIONS

There is indeed, a gigantic job ahead in finding additional ways to use literature to foster international relations. Young people must be stimulated to learn to read early in life, to acquire the habit of reading worthwhile books, and to maintain this habit after they leave the classroom.

A poem by Joseph Joel Keith, which appeared in the Saturday Review even summarizes the impace literature makes upon the individual and upon the group:

"Books are more than words,
More than birds'
Brightness, more than a song,
They last long.

When the covers close
Wisdom grows.
Every thought is root,
Leaf and fruit.
Every good page turned
Is lore learned."

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